



Republic of Artsakh / Nagorno Karabakh

Karabakh-Azerbaijan conflict: refugees, displaced persons and territories

Active phase of the Karabakh-Azerbaijan conflict lasted from 1991 till 1994, claiming more than 30,000 lives, and forcing closed to a million Armenians and Azerbaijanis out of their homes. The issue of Armenian and Azerbaijani refugees, as well as the demarcation of border between the Republic of Artsakh and Azerbaijani Republic are important components of the settlement process.

Refugees and displaced persons in Artsakh

By 1918, the Armenian population of Nagorno Karabakh reached around 330,000. Attacks by Turkish and Azeri troops in 1918-1920, in continuation of the Armenian Genocide, took lives of 55,000 (or 20%) of local population. In Shushi alone (*then - capital of Artsakh and one of the largest towns in the Transcaucasus*), some 20,000 Armenians were killed during three days of attacks by Turkish army. Despite the tragic developments, Armenians continued to constitute the overwhelming majority in Artsakh.

In 1923, after series of military clashes and resistance by Artsakh's National Council to accept administration of Soviet Azerbaijan, as well as with the *Sovietisation* of the entire South Caucasus, the Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region, or NKAR, was established as part of the Soviet Union's Republic of Azerbaijan with demographic composition of 95 percent Armenian, 3 percent Azeri, and 2 percent of Russians, Greeks, Jews and other minorities. The region was established by the Soviet Bolsheviks on around 40% of the territory of Artsakh.

During the 70 years of the Soviet Azerbaijan's regime, the NKAR saw consistent discrimination of its Armenian population, remained artificially underdeveloped, and mainly used as provider of raw materials. Lack of economic opportunities and cultural discrimination has led to emigration of close to 60,000 Armenians, and their replacement with Azerbaijani and other nationals, who were more comfortable with rural economic activities.

As a result, during the Soviet period Armenian population of the NKAR did not increase in absolute numbers, and fell to 77% in terms of percentage. Simultaneously, waves of re-settlers from outside the region increased the number of local Azerbaijani population sevenfold, from 3% to 21%.

The 1989 USSR population census has registered that the NKAR's population was 189,000; with 145,5 thousand (or 76.9%) Armenians, and 40,6 thousand (or 21,5%) Azeris. The neighbouring Armenian-populated Shahumyan district (*part of historic Artsakh that was not included by the Soviets as part in the Oblast*), had 17,000 Armenian (or 80%) and over 3,000 Azeri population. The census, however, did not consider 23,000 Armenian refugees from Sumgait and other cities in Azerbaijan, who by January, 1989, had escaped from anti-Armenian pogroms, and lived in the former NKAR.

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By 1989, population of the NKAO and adjacent Shahumyan district was 185,000 Armenian, 44,000 Azeri, and close to 3500 Russian, Ukrainian, Greek and Tatar.

Artsakh territories to NKAR's north were densely populated by Armenians. In 1930s, under the new Soviet rule, the borders of those territories have also been repeatedly redrawn, then eventually divided and incorporated into Soviet Azerbaijan's newly created administrative districts of *Dashkesan, Shamkhor, Gedabek, and Khanlar*. Up until 1988, Armenians constituted an absolute majority of the population of Northern Karabakh:

| | |
|---------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>Khanlar district</i> | <i>14,600</i> |
| <i>Dashkesan district</i> | <i>7,300</i> |
| <i>Shamkhor district</i> | <i>12,400</i> |
| <i>Gedabek district</i> | <i>1,000</i> |
| <i>City of Gyanja (Gandzak)</i> | <i>48,100</i> |
| Total | 83,400 |

Forced deportations of Armenians from Azerbaijan started in autumn of 1988, and were completed in 1991 with the beginning of the active military phase of the conflict. In April - May, 1991, a joint operation of Azerbaijan's Ministry of Interior and Soviet Internal troops attacked and destroyed the area's last Armenian-populated settlements of *Ghetashen* and *Martunashen*. The operation was called *The Ring*. 24 Armenian settlements in were occupied by Azerbaijan, and their entire population was deported.

By autumn 1992, the Azerbaijani army occupied and deported local Armenian population in the entire Shahumyan district, as well as 60% of Martakert district, and parts of Martuni, Askeran and Hadrut districts of Artsakh. Around 66,000 Armenians became refugees or internally displaced persons. By 1994, Artsakh defence army liberated most of the republic's occupied territories allowing return of 35,000 refugees. The entire Shahumyan district, and parts of the Martakert and Martuni regions of the Republic of Artsakh remain under Azerbaijan's occupation.

By late 1988, the Armenian population of the NKAR, the Shahoumian district and the Northern Artsakh was around 268,000 people.

The total number of Armenian refugees and displaced persons from Artsakh is 114,000: with 83,000 from Northern Artsakh, and 31,000 from Shahumyan, Martakert and Martuni regions. Currently, appr. 20% of total population of the Republic of Artsakh (around 30,000) are refugees from Azerbaijan and displaced persons. So far, political obstacles prevent refugees residing in Artsakh from access to international humanitarian relief programs.*

* Information is based on the following sources:

- The 1989 Soviet Union population census,
- The Department of Statistics of the Oblast Soviet of the NKAO,
- The Regional Executive Committee of the Shahumian District,
- The Committee on Refugees of the NKR

The aforementioned calculations did not include Armenian population, who lived outside Artsakh. The issue of the hundreds of thousands of Armenian refugees from Baku, Sumgait and other major towns and districts of Azerbaijan should be discussed as part of negotiations towards a comprehensive settlement of the Artsakh-Azerbaijan conflict.

Occupied parts of Artsakh

Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Region has been created by the Soviet authorities on approximately 40% of the historic Artsakh. In 1991, the Republic of Artsakh has been proclaimed in line with then acting Soviet legislation on territory of the NKAR and adjacent Shahumyan district.

In 1992, Azerbaijan's military aggression against Artsakh resulted in occupation of around 300 sq. mi. (or 15%) of then-territory of the Republic of Artsakh: the entire Shahumyan district, and parts of the Martakert and Martuni districts.

With the course of hostilities, the Artsakh defense army restored control over the significant portion of the historic Artsakh, which had not been included by the Bolsheviks into the NKAR. In accordance with the Article 175 of the Constitution of the Republic of Artsakh, "until the restoration of the territorial integrity of the Republic of Artsakh, and the delimitation of its borders, the public authority shall be exercised on the territory under factual jurisdiction of the Republic of Artsakh".

Azerbaijan

Official statements in Baku and data from Azerbaijan's official sources periodically allege '*occupation of 20% of its territory, and existence of more than 1 million refugees and displaced persons as a result of Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan, and seizure by Armenia of both NK and adjacent districts*'. Here, main reference is made on relevant Resolutions by the UN Security Council, although none of the Resolutions mentions Armenia as aggressor or demands withdrawal of troops (see the 1993 UN SC resolutions 822, 853, 874, 884).

The issue of territories of Azerbaijan

According to the maps often referred to by Azerbaijan's officials, the area of the Azeri territories controlled by the Artsakh defence army reaches 3,390 sq. mi., with the total area of Azerbaijan 33,430 sq. mi. The area of seven adjacent to NKAR former districts of Azerbaijani Soviet Republic make up 10% of the Azerbaijan's total territory. Even if Azeri officials consider the Republic of Artsakh among "occupied territories", the total area will make 13% of the territory of Azerbaijan, less than 15% of the territory of the Republic of Artsakh that remains under occupation by Azerbaijan.

In the course of the 1991-1994 military phase of the confrontation, Azerbaijan lost control over former Lachin, Kelbadjar, Kubatly, Zangelan and Jebail regions, as well as about a third of the Agdam and Fizuly districts.

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According to Azerbaijani data ** the area and Azerbaijani population of the mentioned districts are:

| District | Territory (sq. mi.) | Population (thousand) |
|------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>Kelbadjar</i> | 747 | 50,6 |
| <i>Lachin</i> | 708 | 59,9 |
| <i>Kubatly</i> | 309 | 30,3 |
| <i>Jebrail</i> | 405 | 51,6 |
| <i>Zangelan</i> | 273 | 33,9 |
| <i>Agdam</i> | 422 | 158 |
| <i>Fizuly</i> | 535 | 100 |

The total area of the first five districts is 2,442 sq. mi. The total area of the Agdam and Fizuly districts is 957 sq.mi., with the parts under control by Artsakh authorities: 35% of Agdam and 25% of Fizuly districts, i.e. 147 sq. mi. and 133 sq. mi. respectively.

Thus, the allegations of 3,390 sq. mi. of area 'lost' by Azerbaijan in 1991-1994 are groundless. The total area of the territories Azerbaijan lost control as a result of continued aggression against Artsakh is instead 2,725 sq.mi., which is 8% of the area of the former Soviet Azerbaijan, 2.5 times smaller than the 20% constantly mentioned by officials in Baku in order to mislead the international community.

Refugees in Azerbaijan

In 1988-1989, 168,000 thousand Azerbaijanis left Armenia*. Most of them left Armenia eight to ten months after the Armenian pogroms in Sumgait in February 1988, and deportation of 350 thousand Armenians from the Soviet Azerbaijan. Most of the Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia either exchanged or sold their real estate, or received financial compensation (appr. \$98 million in total) paid by the Government of Soviet Armenia.

Practically the entire Azerbaijani population of the NKAR (40,600 people or 21,5% of the population, according to the 1989 USSR census), left the Karabakh during the active phase of hostilities. Residents of the Shahumyan district's all four Azeri-populated villages remained in their houses.

Tens of thousands Azeri refugees have moved into the abandoned homes and apartments previously owned by Armenians that had been deported of the northern part of Nagorno Karabakh*.

** Sources:

- Data of the Ministry of Defense of the AR, disseminated by the Embassy of the AR in the Russian Federation in the autumn of 1994;
- 1989 census in the USSR;
- Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic: Administrative-Territorial Division. Azgosizdat. Baku 1979;
- *Mukhalifat* (Azeri newspaper), 03.04.1996.

* This is the official figure of Azeris living in Armenia in the beginning of 1988, although Baku arbitrarily speaks of some 200 or even 250 thousand Azeris.

* According to the 1989 USSR census, the average Azeri family in the AzSSR consisted of 5.6 persons and the average Armenian family in the AzSSR, of 3.85 people. Apart from that, in the result of 70 years of discriminatory policies against Armenians in AzSSR and driving them out of the republic, there were many empty Armenian houses in Azerbaijan. The owners of these houses had left for Armenia, Russia or other republics of the USSR earlier.

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By 1989, total population of the relevant seven districts was 483,900 people. Considering that former Agdam and Fizuly districts mostly remained under Azerbaijan's control, the total number of refugees from those districts was around 420,000. In 1997, Azerbaijani authorities announced return to their homes of 45,000 people.

The total number of refugees from the mentioned seven districts is 375,000** people; in addition to the 168,000 refugees from Armenia, and 40,000 Azerbaijani refugees from NKAR.

There are 583,000 Azerbaijani refugees from Armenia and NKAR, or 7.9% of its entire population. Official numbers of the 1989 population census, conducted by Azerbaijani Soviet authorities demonstrate that the allegations of one million refugees in Azerbaijan are far from reality, similar to claims about "20% of occupied territories".

Main comparative data

| Territory of the Republic of Artsakh occupied by Azerbaijan | Territory the former Soviet Azerbaijan lost control as a result of the 1991-1994 aggression against Artsakh |
|--|--|
| 15% | 8% |

| Refugees and displaced persons in the Republic of Artsakh | Refugees in the Azerbaijani Republic |
|--|---|
| 20% | 8% |

** Estimated 40 thousand settled in Russia. According to the Russian Ministry of Interior, 1.5 mln. Azeris, citizens of Azerbaijan, currently reside in Russia.

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